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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: Special Envoy Gration's July 22 Visit to Abyei

11. (U) Summary: Special Envoy (SE) Scott Gration traveled to Abyei on July 22 to observe, on the ground, the announcement of the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague on the delimitation of the borders of Abyei. During the course of the day the SE: met with the commanders of the Abyei Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) and the Abyei Administrator, attended the televised announcement of the decision at the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) camp in Abyei, stopped briefly in the town of Mereim, and paid a longer visit to the town of Muglad in the Misseriya heartland where he addressed a meeting of assembled tribal leaders. Despite the very real tensions around the PCA ruling, all sides eschewed violence and representatives from both the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) publicly reiterated their common commitment to abide by The Hague ruling. While there was no jubilation on either side of the compromise decision, the Misseriya clearly felt that they had come out the worse. The high-profile international presence helped defuse trouble in Abyei, as did the efforts of both national and local officials. The peace has held to date, but to maintain this status quo, a continued high-level focus on Abyei will be needed in the weeks and months ahead. End summary.

ORDER IN ABYEI TOWN

12. (U) SE Gration, Charge Whitehead and five other USG officials took an early morning July 22 helicopter flight from Kadugli to Abyei town, a predominantly Ngok Dinka settlement. They witnessed a robust UNMIS presence in the area during the drive to the first stop on the itinerary, the JIU camp on the edge of town, where they met with SPLA Commander Colonel Valentino Tokmac and his Deputy, Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) Colonel Mohammoud Abu Sarah. Valentino remarked that it was good that the SE had come at the time of the ruling to show that the outside world was watching Abyei. He said that the JIU had been in place for three years and had thus far been successful in containing unrest leading up to The Hague ruling. The JIU had three garrisons stationed in the area, one north and one south of the town, and they planned to deploy into Agok when the site there was prepared. He was confident that his forces were "one hundred percent" ready to deal with any unrest sparked by the ruling. Rumors were flying, but civilians on both sides knew that there would be an immediate response to any trouble.

13. (U) Valentino continued that the JIU had contingency plans in place leading up to the announcement as well as post-ruling. They had deployed along the roads in every direction, although there were no forces stationed in several internal areas away from the roads where attacks could occur. The number- one challenge was preventing the entry of firearms, especially from the Misseriya cattle camps in the north. He added that there was no indication that any attack was imminent and thus far calm had prevailed both north and south. Valentino roundly berated the negative impact of the July 21 public statement by UN Special Representative of the Secretary General

Ashraf Qazi on an SPLA presence south of Abyei town. Valentino complained that the Qazi declaration had unnecessarily heightened tension, a refrain the SE was to hear repeated throughout the day. He said that one militia had been reported moving from the north after the announcement, and former Southern Sudan police officer Samuel Deng had been ordered back after he moved up from the south. He repeated that the JIU could contain would-be spoilers and confirmed that outside of the JIU, the Joint Police Integrated Units, UNMIS and 35 NISS officers, he was unaware of any other armed forces in Abyei in violation of the road map. Only Misseriya in the cattle camps were armed. Valentino concluded that it was not his place to decide how the JIU deployment might be restructured after the ruling. He said that his men were adequately trained, equipped and organized, although heavier weapons were minimal. He had heard that the Abyei JIU was considered one of the best of these units.

¶4. (U) The route to the headquarters of Abyei Administrator Arop Mayak, the next stop on the itinerary, was lined by new construction of tukuls (traditional huts) and more permanent structures in replacement of those that had been destroyed in the fighting in Abyei May 2008. Arop told the SE that he was there to support the ruling, and not take sides. Some individuals would certainly be disappointed by the ruling, but the PCA was the mutually-agreed forum for the decision, and his message to all the people of Abyei was peace. Arop thanked SE Gration for showing the USG's concern, and then remarked that he had been taken aback by Qazi's "painful and unexpected" statement. He claimed that Qazi had been informed in advance of the SPLA presence in Abyei. The latter was reportedly an element of Salva Kiir's personal protection force returning to Juba by land after Kiir's recent visit to the Nuba Mountain area. SE Gration said that he was heartened by the rebuilding he had witnessed, a testament to the people of Abyei investing in their

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future. The US was confident that Abyei could succeed. Arop said that they were trying to do their best. For the first time in a decade the central track of the north/south Misseriya migration route had been open. Two Ngok Dinka/Misseriya reconciliation conferences had gone smoothly, and the third had been canceled due to the visit of Kiir to the region, another major milestone in defusing tensions between the two communities.

¶5. (U) The final stop in Abyei town was the UNMIS camp, where several hundred people had gathered to see the televised PCA ruling. The most charitable way to describe the event would be chaotic. On the international side, the SE and party joined Qazi and his delegation, the Dutch Ambassador representing the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (EAC), and the Special Envoy of the European Union. On the national side, Government of National Unity (GNU) Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of National Unity Deng Alor, GNU Minister of Health Tabita Sokaya and Blue Nile State Governor Malik Agar represented the SPLM; and GNU Minister of Interior Ibrahim Hamid and State Minister of Humanitarian Affairs Dr. Abdel Bagi El-Janini represented the NCP. There was much scrambling to find a suitable television feed - for a time, the audience was treated to CNN coverage of the Tour de France - an Arabic language al Jazeera program broadcast the ruling live. There was no celebration as the outlines of the ruling became clear, but no palpable disappointment either. The SE departed Abyei for Meiram immediately after the broadcast ended.

HAPPINESS ALL AROUND IN MEIRAM

¶6. (U) Within minutes of touching down on the football field near the market in Meiram, the helicopter carrying the SE and representatives of the SPLM and NCP was surrounded by a throng of excited townspeople who certainly knew by then that this predominantly Misseriya settlement would become part of South Kordofan under the PCA ruling. State Minister Bagi El-Jalani was the first person to address the crowd from the bed of a pick-up truck. He introduced SE Gration and thanked President Obama for sending him to Abyei on this historic day, which triggered cheering and loud chant of "Obama! Obama!" from the crowd. Foreign Minister Deng Alor, spoke next to frequent roars of approval from the audience, and Minister Sokaya followed. SE Gration delivered the final address to more ecstatic cheering from the crowd, and

after forty minutes on the ground, the helicopter was airborne on the way to the town of Muglad in the Misseriya heartland to the north.

FEAR AND LOATHING IN MUGLAD

17. (U) NCP Governor of South Kordofan Ahmed Haroun and two parked Mi-35 helicopter gunships normally stationed in either El Fasher or El Obeid were waiting at the airport to welcome the arriving delegation. A motorcade whisked the party to the government complex where a crowd of approximately 100 Misseriya leaders was seated in the shade of a large tree. Joined by Deputy Governor of South Kordofan, the SPLM's Abel Azeez El-Hilu, the delegates began a town hall of sorts with an audience best characterized as silent and sullen. Haroun opened by introducing the visitors and welcoming them to Muglad. Dr. Bagi El-Jalani followed, repeating the NCP's commitment to abide by the PCA ruling and emphasizing that the rights of the Misseriya to migrate south with their cattle and gain access to water points in the dry season would be respected. No applause followed his presentation, and his mention of President Obama elicited only silence. Deng Alor, a Ngok Dinka whose village of origin is south of Muglad, spoke next, eliciting a few grudging laughs when he remarked that the Ngok and Misseriya had sat around under a tree instead of settling the contentions between them as they had in the old days, thus leading to the arbitration in The Hague. He spoke at length on neighborliness and common ties. Stony silence followed his remarks.

18. (U) SE Gration spoke next, pointing to the tree and its branches and remarking that it existed and provided food, shelter, firewood and shade only because it was solidly rooted in the earth. The Misseriya and Dinka both needed to develop strong roots together if they were to grow the prosperous future that their descendants deserved. Two Misseriya elders spoke next, the first flatly stating that the ruling had not been in favor of the Misseriya. Despite this, he continued, they would accept it and seek to exist in harmony with their Dinka neighbors. He harked back to the inter-communal comity of yesteryear and called for its revival. He remarked, however, that it would be difficult to imagine much harmony if all of the resources committed to the region went to the Dinka in Abyei and the Misseriya in the north did not receive their fair share. A second elder spoke in harsher, more agitated tones,

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sardonically congratulating Deng Alor for having carried the day, but also stating that the Misseriya were prepared to accept this outcome. He warned, however, that the Misseriya would not hesitate to react if their rights were violated. The next speaker was the local imam, who quoted a sura from the Quran on brotherhood, and then reminded the assembly that their grandfathers had lived beside and worked with and even intermarried with the Dinka. The old ways had been good. The Misseriya, he concluded, were people of peace, and they should seek peace as the way forward. For the first and only time during the meeting, the Misseriya leaders applauded loudly. Governor Haroun adjourned the meeting on that note; the delegation was off for the airport; and the day in Abyei was done.

19. (SBU) Comment: Thanks to the high-level presence in both Dinka and Misseriya areas of Abyei and the successful pre-ruling arrangements by the UNMIS, the GNU, the JIU and local officials; the potentially-explosive ruling came off smoothly. In an agreed joint statement, the NCP and SPLM again reiterated their readiness to abide by and implement the decision. These were felicitous steps forward, but as Salva Kiir later commented in Juba, "the announcement in Abyei was not the final solution to the problems there." Due to the nature of the ruling, which split petroleum resources and land in a compromise solution, neither side was entirely pleased with the outcome. In sum, however, the Dinka appeared less unhappy about the outcome than the Misseriya, if the mood in Muglad was any indication. The potential for clashes in Abyei and surrounding areas remains a real possibility over the next months, and especially with the advent of the dry season and the southward migration of the Misseriya herders. The AEC will convene its plenary in Abyei on August 2 and 3 to keep a focus on the area. Additional high-level attention and additional resources will be needed to move this region toward January 2011 and what will be the next huge challenge - whether Abyei chooses to cast its lot with the

South or retain its current special status in the North.

The Special Envoy has cleared this cable.

WHITEHEAD